Leon County vows to fight climate change

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Body

Local nature around Tallahassee. Photo by Jaylnn McDuffey

You can't escape it. On the news or even on your screens. Climate change is a topic the public can no longer ignore.

With growing concerns over the hotter summers and stronger hurricanes, cities all over the state of Florida are starting to address the change in climate that even the halls of the Capitol are beginning to see.

But the Republican lawmakers who occupy them belong to a party that denies climate change's existence, but they need to see outside of party lines. The steps being taken by Leon County commissioners despite party affiliations is an attempt to make climate change a bi-partisan issue.

With 69% of Americans in favor of taking steps towards carbon neutrality, and only 23% of Republicans/Republican leaning viewing it as a major threat, party supporters want those running for office to address the general beliefs that their party does not care about climate change.

And they didn't disappoint.

As Ron Desantis avoided the question altogether, and Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswam calling it the "climate change agenda," something often repeated by right-wing climate deniers, it painted an exact picture of how the American people would view their climate change beliefs. But as more and more cities step up, Tallahassee has taken time to do the same.

On Sept. 12, Leon County commissioners declared a "climate emergency" while also passing a climate emergency resolution, with plans to make the county carbon neutral by 2050.

Outlining the use of clean renewable energy and collaborations between Florida State and Florida A&M University researchers to develop technological advancements, the county plans to use a "consulting firm to study its electric utility system to identify the long-term clean energy pathways forward."

The plan is based on partnerships. Like the ones built with the youth of Tallahassee who work with GenCLEO.

"It was a great feat," said Gisela Alvizures, campus organizer for FSU's chapter of GenCLEO, a non-profit that "empowers individuals and communities to comprehend and address climate challenges through data-driven initiatives and grassroots advocacy."

The group, which has been working with Leon County commissioners for the last year and a half, are major contributors and motivators for this leap. With the idea to "push the bar" past local government, the young leaders

of the organization began meeting with the commissioners, GenCLEO's Regional Manager Samatha Kaddis regaled on their months of effort.

"Meeting elected officials who wanted to listen to the youth, and genuinely listened to our concerns brought me hope," Kaddis said.

Now looking back on her efforts, she hopes that it will bring the empowered youth to start creating these relationships for change too,

"With the passing of many months after our resolution it has brought me a lot of hope not only for the youth, but for the government. I feel like our generation has given up a lot of hope in our government,' Kaddis said.

And the government mistrust stems back to the party in office. With the American people viewing the right as climate deniers, GenCLEO wants to remind the public that climate change won't just impact right- or left-wingers - but everyone on the planet.

"Just on the topic of different parties, it shouldn't matter what your side believes as being truthful, but about helping those who are affected. That is why GenCLEO is non-partisan ... that is one of the many ways we can keep fostering this non-partisan climate change initiative," said Nia Ogletree, lead organizer for the GenCLEO chapter in Tallahassee.

Ogletree recounted the ways the organization's participants wanted to make sure that the resolution would allow for citizen involvement through work with local schools and organizations. "Education is the root of where things start," Ogletree said.

The goal of GenCLEO, and their hopes for the climate emergency resolution is, "that everyone can benefit from the switch to clean energy. Whatever steps the country takes towards climate resolution .... Everyone in the county can benefit from these initiatives," Kaddis said.

With the youth are calling for direct change, and answers, from both parties they are not sitting idly by. As rising adults are making direct actions they now look to their representatives to wave a white banner to make for a greener planet.

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